

From Section 3: Delighting in God's People

*"As for the saints who are in the land,
they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight." Psalm 16:3*

Nine Marks of a Healthy Church (Hills to Thrive on, Cry on, and Die on)

Perhaps you have heard of my husband, Mark. If so, it is very likely because of something called "Nine Marks of a Healthy Church." These are not some new ideas of his, but a cataloging of what God delights in for His people and what He calls them, as the church, to do.

These basic, biblical elements that help churches grow and thrive have been the heart of my husband's shepherding as he has "Preached, Prayed, Loved and Stayed" at Capitol Hill Baptist for over 30 years. Usually, he speaks to pastors about the Nine Marks because they are crucial for their calling of shepherding and equipping the members of their local church.

Why You Should Care about These Biblical Truths

You probably understand why your husband might think these are important in how he shepherds your local church, but did you know that there are very good reasons for you, as pastor's wife, to know and care about these, too. If your church situation turns out to be anything like ours, it is very likely that these are the things he spends hours praying and planning for it that your church might flourish and grow. And when the congregation is thriving, that makes your husband's shepherd heart sing.

Perhaps just as likely, if your husband comes home tired and discouraged, having had a hard day of pastoring, the struggle probably had to do with something to do with an aspect of one of these biblical marks. Or, in the heart-wrenching case that your husband is asked to leave the church, (for a reason other than sin), the root cause will likely somehow be connected to a disagreement over one of these concepts.

Knowing these can help you know the heartbeat of what your husband is called to do, and THAT can make you a better pray-er, better encourager, and better helper to him and lover of the church. And perhaps most of all, they may help you—like they have helped me—understand why there are some "mountains" of biblical truth that are so important to the church that they are worth fighting and even "dying" for. So, let me introduce you to the "Marks", where you find them in the Bible, and why these are so important to what your husband does to delighting in "the saints" in your local church.

Nine, Eleven, or Both?

One last note: you will actually find I've listed 11 Marks but my husband's book is called "Nine Marks of a Healthy Church. What's the deal? Well, basically, he added two additional marks and simply smooshed together four of the original marks into two marks. So, I joke with him and call them the eleven marks and present them as such here. Ha!

I've grouped them by categories:

- Biblical Marks of Becoming God's People: The Gospel and Conversion, Evangelism and Missions
- Biblical Marks of Gathering as God's People: Church Membership, Exposition Preaching, Prayer
- Biblical Marks of Maturing as God's People: Biblical Theology, Discipleship, Church Discipline
- Biblical Marks of Shepherding God's People: Biblical Leadership

The Biblical Marks of Becoming God's People

Mark 1. The Gospel:

God delights in saving sinners. He planned for us to share the good news of Christ that many might be saved.

The gospel is the good news by which we become God's people and in which we continue to find hope as God's people. It is salvation through Jesus for all who repent of their sins and trust in Him as their Savior. The gospel is the foundation of our faith that we build upon and grow upon every day of our lives.

The gospel is:

- **GOD:** The LORD is the one and only God. He is the creator and king of everything. He is holy and made us in his image to know him, enjoy him and to obey Him. (Genesis 1:26-28).
- **MAN:** We should obey Him, but we have all chosen to rebel against Him and His good ways. We are cut off from Him. We face His judgment and eternal punishment for our sins. (Genesis 3; Romans 3:23).
- **CHRIST:** We deserved nothing, yet in His great love, God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to be our Savior. Fully God, Jesus became a man. He lived the perfect life that we should have lived, fulfilling every bit of God's law. Then on the cross, He offered up His perfect life as the perfect payment for the sins of all those who would ever turn from their sin and trust in Him as their Savior. • Jesus died and was buried that day, but on the third day, He rose again from the dead, showing that God had accepted Christ's sacrifice and God's wrath against our sin was completely satisfied. ((John 1:14; Heb. 7:26; Rom. 3:21-26, 5:12-21). Acts 2:24, Rom. 4:25).
- **RESPONSE:** Now God calls us to repent of our sins and trust in Christ as our Savior. (Acts 17:30, John 1:12). If we do, God gives us eternal life. He makes us a new person, giving us a new heart filled with His Spirit. (John 3:16). And not just a new person, but part of a new people, His people, He is gathering from every tribe and nation, to be His dearly loved people who will enjoy Him forever. (Matt. 16:15-19; Eph. 2:11-19).

Helpful Bible Verses

The Gospel is the message that saves us:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, -- Ephesians 1:13, NIV

We never outgrow the gospel

"Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." --1 Corinthians 15:1-4, NIV

How is being careful about the gospel delighting in the saints?

The gospel is the only way any of us can be saved. Only through hearing and receiving this good news we can become God's people, the very saints, in whom God and in whom we are to delight. And, it is the most foundational theology on which most everything the church does flows out from. To get the gospel wrong is to give false hope to dying people.

A clear telling of the gospel is the first and most basic way in which we delight in the saints. That means we need to delight in the saints (or saints-to-be), we must love them by helping them understand the whole gospel so they can make a true decision. The gospel stripped of our sin, makes no understanding of the Savior. The gospel stripped of the new life of repentance, will be a lifeless faith without fruit. That is destructive to the people who think they are saved but aren't. The gospel separated from membership in the church, leads to Christians who should look distinct from the world, but do not.

Mark 2. Conversion:

Conversion: Becoming God's People

God delights in His people becoming new creations.. He planned for us to show true change that reflects His character and, in light of that, give each other assurance of our new life in Christ.

Conversion is the powerful work in which we are made new people in Christ. It is the biblical understanding about how we become God's people—both God's part and our part in it. From the Bible we know that because we are dead in our sins, God must act to bring us to live by the work of His Holy Spirit through His Word, the Bible. He is the one who gives us the gifts of understanding, of faith to believe, and the ability to turn away from our sins and live for Him. People must receive the gospel, repent of their sins and trust in Jesus as their Savior.

Helpful Bible Verses:

God brings us to spiritual life:

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

God gives us repentance and faith to believe

"He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Acts 5:31, NIV

"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Romans 2:4,NIV

What we do in conversion:

Repent of our sins and believe in Jesus

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" – Mark 1:15,NIV

Looking for signs of conversion

"Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. 16 You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. 18 A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So you'll recognize them by their fruit." --Matthew 7:15-20

"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail the test. And I hope you will recognize that we ourselves do not fail the test." --2 Corinthians 13:5-6

How is Being Careful about Conversion Delighting in the Saints?

Conversion is the sign that someone has truly become one of God's people. And, while, only God can truly know hearts, we can expect to see fruit in keeping with repentance in those who have been made new in Christ.

When this fruit is missing, it is our opportunity to humbly revisit the gospel with someone who claims to be a Christian. We do them no good to stay quiet when their very eternity may be at stake! When this fruit is missing after we share the gospel with, it is an opportunity to patiently keep praying and waiting. Conversion is the sign that someone has truly become one of God's people. And, while, only God can truly know hearts, we can expect to see fruit in keeping with repentance in those who have been made new in Christ.

When this fruit is missing, it is our opportunity to humbly revisit the gospel with someone who claims to be a Christian. We do them no good to stay quiet when their very eternity may be at stake! When this fruit is missing after we share the gospel with, it is an opportunity to patiently keep praying and waiting upon the Lord for His work in an individual's heart. Manipulation will not bring anyone to saving faith in Christ; but it can lead to false conversion and false sense of assurance that make it more difficult for someone to their need for salvation.

But, when this fruit is present, it is what makes us, as individuals, shine like lights to the world and points others to God. And, it is this fruit in us, as a people gathering together, committing themselves to worship God and love one another together, that make the church look like the distinctly different people of God they are meant to be.

Side note: An implication of this mark is to reserve baptism for those who clearly are bearing the fruit of conversion. This is often a very tricky point for those considering the baptism of children. We have personally known many pastors who have "fought" and "died" on this mountain, as they have expressed the prudence of waiting until a young child is a bit older, and the fruit of salvation can be recognized more generally by the congregation before they are baptized.

It may be felt by parent or child as an attack on the legitimacy of the child's profession, but it is meant for the good of the child and the church. It stems from years of stories of early baptisms and false conversions, then "re-baptisms" in high school or college when as a teenager, the child feels the tug of the world, and chooses Jesus and experiences what they admit is true conversion.

In case this is new to you, it's not saying young children can't become Christians. But the idea, as the historical church held for years, that we can encourage young children in their faith, while waiting a bit later for a consistent life of fruit, so as not to confuse them and for the clarity of the witness of the church. Pray for your husbands to make good decisions in this tricky area for the good of the children, the parents, and the church.

Michael Lawrence has an excellent article on this: <https://www.9marks.org/article/give-them-time-how-to-protect-the-assuring-nature-of-a-childs-baptism/>

Mark 3. Evangelism

God delights in growing His family. He planned for us to take the gospel to others.

Evangelism comes from the word meaning to tell the good news. That is exactly what it is: sharing the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus, with others, that they might repent of their sins and trust in Jesus as their Savior. It is urging them to repent of their sins and believe in Him that they might be saved. It is telling them that they deserve God's punishment for their sins yet can receive God's mercy and love. It is helping them understand that repentance means turning away from an old way of life and turning to God to live His way. Faith will be joined with fruit.

Each person must make their own, personal response to the gospel, but that is just the beginning. God saves individuals not to live as isolated individuals, but to be a part of His people, the Church. An important part of evangelism is folding new believers into a local church where they can grow up in Christ and build up one another.

Helpful Bible Verses

Ambassadors for Christ

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."
2 Corinthians 5:18-20 ESV

Be Ready to Share

"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."
-- 1 Peter 3:15

Why is evangelism delighting in the saints?

God has ordained that it is through our sharing the gospel with people that they will be saved. This makes evangelism the first, necessary step in anyone becoming one of God's people and growing up into Christ as His disciple. If we delight in there being saints, we will share the gospel as God has planned for us to. How will they hear and respond, if no one shares with them?

But it is also important to remember that delighting in the saints means that while God has given us an integral part, we look to Him to act to bring about salvation. Our evangelism should not be manipulative. It is God who grows the seeds of His Word by His Spirit. It is ours to delight by telling and by praying. It is His to delight by bringing to life.

Mark 4. Missions

God delights in including people from every tribe and nation in His family. He planned for us to go to those places and tell them the good news.

From before the beginning, God has planned to call a people to Himself from every tribe and nation. We see in Revelation 21 this plan fulfilled as all God's people are gathered together before God's throne to praise Him and enjoy Him forever. How does God call all these people to Himself? It starts with missions. Missions is taking the good news of Jesus to people in another culture from our own. As they hear the gospel, repent and believe, these new believers form local churches who gather together to worship God and love one another. Together, they grow up in Christ as His disciples.

Helpful Bible Verses:

Called to Go

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." --Matthew 28:19-20

Our Telling Is God's Plan for Others to Be Saved

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" --Romans 10:14-15

All Nations Will Here Before Jesus Comes Back

This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." --Matthew 24:14

How Is Missions Delighting in the Saints?

Missions is the first, necessary step we must take for people from other lands becoming God's people and growing up into Christ as His disciples. If we delight in there being saints from every tribe and nation, we will be a part of sending or going to these faraway places to tell them the gospel, help them grow as disciples and be established in thriving local churches so they can continue the good work of the gospel within their own country.

And not only that, we also delight in the saints through missions by being a part of bringing the gospel to all nations so that God's plans for this world is completed and He at last brings all of His people to that delightful day when we will all gather around His throne as one people enjoying their wonderful God forever.

II. Biblical Marks of Gathering as God's People

Mark 5. Church Membership: God's People Together

God delights in making us part of His family. He planned for us to commit to each other.

Christians are God's people, the Body of Christ, changed by His Holy Spirit, and who stand distinct from the world. Upon their repentance from sins and profession of faith in Christ, they are baptized and become members of a local church, committing themselves to regularly gather together to help each other worship God and to love one another, under the care of godly leaders.

Helpful Bible Verses about Church Membership:

Church members are those who repent, believe, and are baptized

"Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 2:38-42

Church members work towards a life of unity in Christ as one body.

"And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful." Colossians 3:15

The idea of believers in a local church having a special commitment to one another also shows in the way the New Testament churches respond to those who fall into an unrepentant pattern of sin. If there is no special commitment, then there would be no removal of someone from fellowship. (See 1 Corinthians 5)

How Is Caring about Church Membership Delighting in the Saints?

Maybe it sounds exclusive to insiders or snobby to outsiders to require people to join the local church as members. But the focus of church membership, both towards insiders and outsiders, is far more loving than this. To the members inside the church, it is to put stronger arms of care around God's people within the local church, as members commit to love, serve and care for each other with their lives; and, as they welcome their godly leaders to have authority to teach them, lead them and protect them from danger in a way they could not as casual attenders. Church membership is the bond formed from the love vows of God's people to each other. Without it, we lose the atmosphere of trust and steadfast love, worthy of Christ's bride, and brothers and sisters in God's family.

Church membership is also very important to our witness to those outside the church. The covenant we make to each other in church membership acts like a spotlight on the glory of God as reflected in His people to brighten the distinctive attractiveness of the gospel. "Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35.)

God always planned for us to be His people, gathered together here on earth in local churches, committed to each other, and together, reflecting Christ as His body, to the glory of God, for the encouragement of fellow believers, and to the amazement of the world.

Gathering Together to Worship

Local churches are like stages set for the dress rehearsals of the life with God and all His people we will enjoy at the end of time. There, we will gather together forever before His throne, as Christ's bride,

enjoying God and each other fully at last. Church is the incubator of God's plans for His people here on earth. From our local gatherings, God grows us for all the good that He has planned to do through us, and the place where He prepares them for this unfathomable future with Him. Everything else flows out from our commitment to each other in the local church.

That leads us to the next, couple of Marks:

Mark 6. Expositional Preaching

God delights in His people being instructed by His Word. He planned for us to hear His Word regularly read and explained, that we might respond to it together.

"Exposition" is a thorough explanation of an idea. "Expositional preaching" is a sermon that takes a passage of Scripture, considers its main point or points and thoroughly explains it. My husband says expositional preaching answers these three questions in this order: "What does it say?", "What does it mean?" and "What does it mean for us today?". This type of preaching is in contrast to a topical sermon, which is centered around a given topic which is explained by use of many different passages throughout the Bible.

Helpful Bible Verses:

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
-- Colossians 3:16

"They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." --Nehemiah 8:8

"I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear." --2 Timothy 4:1-4

Examples of expositional preaching from the New Testament: Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 2:14-41, 13:16-47; Hebrews 3:7-4:13

Why Is Expositional Preaching Delighting in the Saints?

This is the main thing God's people do together, and the main thing God calls us to do together when we gather as a church. God's Word is the rock of our understanding, our faith, and our lives. Expositional preaching builds solid understanding of the Bible in context. God's Word is alive and is powerful to save and transform people.

This verse by verse, passage by passage, approach lets God and His emphasis speak forcefully for itself on whatever subjects are at hand, instead of piecing together what we want it to say, as can easily happen with topical sermons. God promises that His Word never goes out void. It always achieves its purpose. Expositional preaching is the rich food that nourishes God's people to better know God and live for Him even in the darkest trials of life.

Mark 7. Praying Together

God delights in His people's fellowship with Him, together. He planned for us to worship Him together through prayer.

Prayer is foundational to a growing relationship with God. It acknowledges God's greatness and our dependence upon Him. We thank Him for His faithfulness to us and ask Him to continue to provide all we need. God has woven all of our prayers into the unfolding of His sovereign plans, that's why our prayers are so powerful. In Scripture, we see believers having their own private times of prayer, but also praying extensively when they gather together as a local church.

Helpful Bible Verses:

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit."
--Jude 1:20

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." --John 15:5-8

"Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you[] pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them." --Matthew 18:19

"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him." -- Acts 12:5, NIV

How Is Praying Together, Delighting in the Saints?

Praying together as a church is something that many have shortened, perhaps out of a desire to keep a service a certain length; or thinking that people will be bored; or sadly, forgetting how much good is done through our prayers together as a church. the importance and the power to act that God has placed within our prayers. And, forgetting that as we pray together, God not only acts, but also teaches us about Himself, reminds us of our utter dependence upon Him, encourages of His power to act as He answers us, and knits our hearts together in unity as we meditate on Him.

III. Gathering Together to Encourage and Build Up One Another

Mark 8. Biblical Theology

God delights in His people becoming like Christ. He planned for us to help each other grow through understanding truths about Him, ourselves, the world, and His plans.

Biblical theology is understanding what God says in His Word about Himself, about His plans and work in the world; and, about how He would have us live. While expositional preaching helps us understand individual Bible passages and how we can apply them to our lives.

Biblical theology creates a framework of truths about God from the whole of Scripture. It is like looking at the many facets of a diamond to appreciate it in its entirety. It starts with the head, but does not end there. Good theology informs our hearts—growing our love for God—and our lives—how to live out that love in lives that please Him.

Helpful Bible Verses:

Biblical truths fill the mind, then flow into our hearts and lives

“What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” --2 Timothy 1:13-14

Give us the ability to discern false teaching

Many deceivers have gone out into the world; they do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves so that you don't lose what we have worked for, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who does not remain in Christ's teaching but goes beyond it does not have God. The one who remains in that teaching, this one has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home, and do not greet him; for the one who greets him shares in his evil works. --2 John 7-11

Comfort and encourage us in times of suffering

“[God] comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” --2 Corinthians 1:4

Why Is Learning Biblical Theology Delighting in the Saints?

To learn biblical theology is to put in your hands God's words of comfort, encouragement, discernment, and perseverance that enlighten and strengthen each other for life. It is how we understand the gospel—how we can be saved; and the basis of our discipleship—how we grow in Christ. It is how we discern lies from false teachers, from the world and from our own, deceitful hearts.

It is how we go on trusting even when life is so hard and the future seems bleak. It is what forms the basis of our unity in truth and informs our worship of God. It impacts every area of the Christian life, personally and as a church. As Martin Luther once said, “Theology is not dry, heady stuff, but how we live and die.” And so it is. But I would add: it's not only how we live and die, but how we help each other live and die well, too.

Mark 9: Discipleship

God delights in His people reflecting Him to each other and to the world. He planned for us to help one another mature into Christ, their Head.

The goal of sharing the good news of Jesus with someone is not them simply making a confession of faith but making a change of life. This change of life from our own way of life to God's is called discipleship. It is growing in our knowledge of God and our loving obedience to Him, starting with repentance, belief and baptism when we first become a Christian, and continues the rest of our lives.

While we do grow in knowledge of God and obedience on our own, God's Word shows us that we grow best when we gather together in a local church. We are called the body of Christ—a unit under our head, Jesus Christ. Godly leaders help show us the way God wants us to live. And, as “body parts” we are to work together to help each other grow up in godliness. Everyone is to be a part of encouraging and building up one another.

Helpful Bible Verses:

Encouraging each other to love and live in ways that please God and do the good He wants us to do.

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” --Hebrews 10:24

Helping others grow where they are

“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.” --1 Thessalonians 5:14

Confessing our sin to one another

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.” --James 5:16

Doing good to one another

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

Helping each other be the aroma of Christ to the world

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” -- John 13:34-35

Why Discipleship Is Delighting in the Saints?

God means for His people to be transformed into His likeness. We are to be the beautiful bride of Christ, seen to reflect His goodness. This is no easy thing for sinners, like us. We need each other to help us to keep on persevering in becoming like Christ. We need good teaching to help us to rightly understand God's Word and how God wants us to live. We need the examples of others to learn how to fight sin and grow in godliness. We need them to pray, to encourage us, and even to correct us. This is an integral part of how God changes His people. And, when we love each other like this, we not only glorify God, but we show the world what He is like:

Mark 10. Church Discipline

God delights in His people reflecting His holiness, for our good and His glory. He planned for us to help each other fight sin and live holy lives.

In one sense, discipline is simply discipleship. It is teaching by word and by example, as a body of believers gathering or one on one, how to live in a manner worthy of Christ. Taken this way, church discipline is just about everything that members of a church do to help each other grow. This kind of discipline is what I've included under discipleship.

Church discipline, as I'm describing here, is the "church version" of what parents do to correct their children when they disobey. This kind of discipline is loving actions aimed at changing destructive behavior for the good of the one being corrected. Church discipline, in this sense, is loving actions of the church aimed at urging a fellow member away from destructive patterns of sin that put in danger their discipleship, put in question their salvation, put in harm's way others' discipleship, and/or put in derision the pure witness of the church to Christ, its head.

Church discipline starts with conversation and loving warnings, but may very well end with being excluded from the Lord's Supper and even from membership, if no pattern of change ultimately occurs. All of these steps are not done in arrogance or maliciousness, but to help a brother or sister turn to the Lord. It is for their eternal good.

Helpful Bible Verses:

Exhorting each other to not be hardened by sin

"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. -- Hebrews 3:13

"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone... also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." --1 Peter 2:1-5

To help those who are in a pattern of sin to turn back

"My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins." -- James 5:19-20

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." --Matt. 18:15-17

To Protect the Purity of the Bride of Christ

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." — Ephesians 5:25-27

Why Is Church Discipline Delighting in the Saints?

No one enjoys being corrected. As Hebrews 12:11 says: "No discipline is pleasant at the time, but painful."

But more important than feeling good about yourself in the moment, is being saved for all eternity. This is why Hebrews 12:11 goes on to say, "[discipline] later on, however, ... produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

This is one of the most difficult acts of love we will ever be asked to perform. But we do it not only for the good of a brother or sister, but to the glory of God. We want the church to look like the Bride of Christ. We want the church to reflect God's character, both up to Him and out to the world. Without discipline for patterns of sin, we choose to leave off love and distort the picture of God the church was meant to provide.

Mark 11. Godly Leadership

God delights in Christ's bride, the Church, being made ready for eternal life with Him. He planned to use pastor-elders to care and equip us through their shepherding.

We have already talked about this quite a bit in previous talks. Suffice it to say here that God has raised up godly men to lead His people as His under-shepherds. The words "pastors", "elders", "bishops", "shepherd" are all biblical terms used for them. God gives them as gifts to His people to equip them with what they need to carry out the ministry He has given them to grow up one another into maturity in Christ. Like Christ, godly elders honor God by selflessly serving God's people. They are called to Nourish the Church with God's Word. And, furnish a godly example in their lives and in their leadership. And, they are to flourish their families, caring well for them, even as they seek to care well for the church.

Helpful Bible Verses:

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." --Ephesians 4:11-13

"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. --1 Peter 5:1-5

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." --John 10:11

How is Godly Leadership Delighting in the Saints?

How isn't it, is a better question. Like Christ, they take joy when God's people grow and glorify God. And like Christ, they not unfrequently bear a heavy load when God's people hold to sinful and selfish ways. They are the ones who equip God's people to know, carry out, and thrive under the other ten, biblical Marks mentioned above. They are the ones that, like the Good Shepherd, lay down their lives for the sake of God's flock.

These men are our husbands. We know their task well. We know their hearts. We know their hurts and their joys. And one day, we will get to see these men receive a special reward for their sacrifices and their

service. Pray for them as they love Christ and His people, by building biblical, spiritual health into their local gathering. Encourage them as they work, pray, preach, and stay... and sometimes, even cry and "die" on these foundational truths.

CONCLUSION

Don't take my husband's word for it! Journal through the New Testament yourself and I'm pretty sure you will see how these nine/eleven mountains rise up over and over to be the basis of healthy, biblical churches. My hope is that in understanding them, you will be able to better recognize what your husband spends his life doing for the good of the church. And, they can fuel your prayers for him and for your church.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Were any of these marks surprising to you?
2. Are there any of these that you have seen help your church flourish?
3. Are there any of these that your husband is particularly trying to implement or is experiencing friction over at your church?
4. How does knowing these eleven marks help you better understand what your husband is trying to do at your church and in how you can encourage him in his work?